

About Book Making

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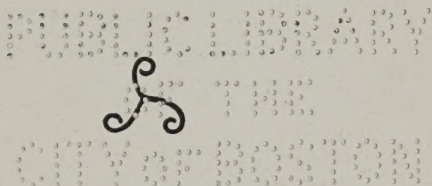
## About Book Making



# About Book Making

AN ADDRESS BEFORE THE  
ROWFANT CLUB IN  
CLEVELAND BY

George French



CLEVELAND

The Imperial Press

MCMIV

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## Author's Note

**T**HE substance of the matter in this little book is a talk delivered at the rooms of the Rowfant Club, Cleveland, on the evening of November 28, 1903. There are some interpolated paragraphs from articles published in the American Printer, the use of which the editor has kindly assented to.

January, 1904



## The Preface



## The Preface

THE tremendous new vogue of books naturally attracts some renewed attention to their making, and has had this agreeable effect, that we are now getting better and handsomer books, more artistically conceived and made books, than the world has ever before seen. This remark has more truth if it be taken to apply more especially to the mass than to the particular; to books as a great product of the age rather than to single volumes. Comparisons between our best books and the best books of all time are not quite profitable, and are not quite fair to our own time. While we are indeed making better books than our fathers made, than we made even a few years ago, it is recognized that we are not making as good books as we may, as good as we know we can make. It is the modest purpose of these few small pages to rather arouse

## The Preface

the better knowledge of the makers of books than to attempt to teach. The simple principles noted are firmly in the minds of the better printers, and are by them put into their practice with some degree of fidelity. It is needful however to insist more strenuously upon what is known to be right. It is for the makers of books to demonstrate and insist; to demonstrate that they have the knowledge and the capacity, and to insist that their capacity and knowledge shall be given play. The publisher is not a bugbear to the author only; he spoils a great quantity of the good work the printers are able to do, by his persistence in wrong ideas about the proper making of books. It is to the publisher, as well as to the printer, that the appeal of these pages is made.

# The Book in Art



## The Book in Art

**T**HE book as an object of art is beginning to make for itself a place in the consideration of people of good taste, and it is proper to inquire if it deserves such consideration, and into the question of its mobility as an art motif.

It is understood that in art the artist must express himself; his medium must be so plastic as to be capable of becoming the embodiment of a condition of mind, an idea, an inspiration. When a painter has stretched his canvas there is, speaking within very wide limits, nothing between him and the expression of his idea but his own limitations. His paints will combine to produce any effect upon his canvas that his mind conceives, still speaking with full recognition of the vague limitations imposed upon him, almost horizon-wide. His finished canvas represents the full perfection of his genius, or his bounds and limitations; it does not sug-

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gest the limitations of the art of painting. It is thus in all the so-called plastic arts. Nothing could be seemingly more cold and inert, giving less promise of splendid fruition, than a mass of Carrara marble ; but the sculptor's chisel is the magic wand that causes lovely creations of genius to break forth from its cold heart. Even the unyielding stone, and the fire-tempered steel, are as wax in the hands of genius. The apparent rigidity of the sculptor's factors are apparent only. They are fused by the fire of his genius.

It is otherwise with the crude materials that enter into the book. They are in fact immobile. No degree of genius, no intensity of enthusiasm, can translate them into plastic elements of art. The metal types are cold, hard inelastic, and so they remain under whatever degree of heat of enthusiasm their manipulation may be essayed.

## The Book in Art

The paper is an element whose extreme of ductility is clearly apparent from the beginning, and is precisely of the same degree and quality at the end of effort. As the separate elements of the book are rigid and unresponsive to artistic effort, so the book itself, as an entity, is inelastic and conventional to a degree eminently discouraging to art. In form it cannot be greatly varied, and it is as beautiful as a geometrical figure, as non-plastic as is each of its constituent elements.

But we are able to condone the form of the book. Custom and association have mellowed or obscured our critical sense, in this regard. We have invested the book physical with the atmosphere of the book literary, and for the sake of the delightfully stimulating spirit we agree with our consciousness to disregard the bald ugliness of the form of the book. We go further. So

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thoroughly do we envelope the material book with the gentle halo of our literary love, that its form has ceased to be tolerable and has become actually lovable. While we are not impressed with the esthetic qualities of a brick, or a rectangular block of wood, we discover beauty in the book.

To aid us in this comes the gentle and exquisite art of the binder, whose office is assuredly to ameliorate. Of binding I am not to speak, except to gratefully acknowledge that it is one process of bookmaking into which art may enter with a freedom that is, by comparison, almost unshackled, and that it is able to gild the somber utility of the book with at least a gleam of free genius.

## What is the Remedy



## What is the Remedy

**W**HAT can be done, then, to bring the book somewhat further within the sphere of art?

First it is to be remembered that the printed book was conceived in art, was born in a form very much nearer to art than it now possesses, and that its progress was constantly downward until a recent date. The very early books were, in many ways, works of art. This was owing to two causes, springing from the same source. The first printers necessarily patterned their books after the exquisite work of the last of the calligraphers, and cut their types in imitation of the gothic characters made with the pen. When books were all inscribed with the pen they were works of art, in a sense and to a degree. When printed books became merchandise, and their multiplication was considered of more moment than their form, they rapidly de-

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teriorated in artistic merit. The cheapening and the increased speed of production proceeded parallel with the artistic degradation. The other cause for early artistic books is the fact that their production was usually under artistic conditions rather than strictly business conditions. The printer was either a person with independent means, or had a patron who sought the production of good work rather than commercial success.

It is cheering to remember however that along this dreary progress toward archaism there have always been bright rays of hope—printers of books who strove either to uphold the old standard or to suggest new ones. So that, while we may believe that the printing art has declined, in the making of books, we may recognize the work of zealous and intelligent disciples and prophets who have endeav-

## What is the Remedy

ored to lead us back to old ideals and forward to new ones.

Yet in the sense we are now considering art in bookmaking, it is essentially a new impulse, almost not at all related to the old art of bookmaking. Whereas the old was a pictorial art, the new is the art that underlies pictorial art. The old art was of the nature of the brush-art of the painter, while the new art is an exemplification of the value and power of the elemental principles and tenets forming the first half of the creed of the painter, as brought into possible play in bookmaking.



# The Optical Quality



## The Optical Quality

**W**HILE a book is an apparently plain piece of typography, it becomes evident, upon examination of the question of its construction, that there is no more subtle study for the student, nor no more difficult task for him to undertake to execute. This is seen to be forcibly true if the printer consents to take into his account the qualities which more powerfully affect the reader than any attribute of strict typography, such as certain optical essentials, and the harmony of literary and typographic motive. The latter quality is a most important one, and, while it is often taken wholly out of the printer's control he finds many opportunities for enforcing his knowledge and so advancing his art.

Referring to the question of optics we find that the argument for a well-printed book does not rest wholly upon artistic or esthetic requirements.

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There is the matter of the eyesight of the readers, and it is of importance enough to merit serious and intelligent consideration. A great many books are issued which show very plainly that thought of the eyes of possible readers had never entered the heads of publisher, author or printer. This is a matter depending very largely upon the artistic question of tone. If there be the proper proportion of white and black on a book page there is less liability of ensuing eye strain for the reader. It is less a question of the size of the type than of tone. I have just been trying to read a book of essays, written by a noted English author, and have been compelled to lay the volume aside; I do not expect to read it until I am able to get the English edition. The American edition is wretchedly wrong in tone. The type is a large-faced one, but its lines are weak and too

## The Optical Quality

uniform; it is heavily leaded and widely spaced. This extreme openness is aggravated by too much space under the page heading, poorly balanced margins, and a paper too white – or rather too blue. The whole effect of this page is to dazzle the eye. The white is so strong that a wavering shadow appears about the letters, and a queer sensation of instability is induced.

If the printer has been an observer of books he will have noticed that the format has much to do with the comfort of the reader. If the pair of pages always in view does not conform to the best custom, in the matter of relative position upon the leaves, there ensues an optical strain which produces discomfort, and sometimes actual distress. In this fact there may be recognized a portion of the authority for the rules governing the format in well-made books. It is an optical ne-

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cessity that demands margins so proportioned as to throw the two visible pages of a book into the relation best suited to the eye, as well as conformable to typographic custom and rules. Our eyes are created to thus view objects; it is the reason for making the upper half of type smaller than the lower half. We do not wish to have the object of our scrutiny in the exact center of our field of vision. If it is placed there by an arbitrary printer we resent the ignorant proceeding, consciously or unconsciously. We assuredly resent it if we have become informed about art sufficiently to cause us to seek for reasons for the impressions we receive, or to create impressions through cultivation.

## Type and Motive



## Type and Motive

**W**E do not make book pages for the purpose of exhibiting type, nor to produce a perfect specimen of typography. We make book pages to express and interpret the words, the thought, the motive, of the author ; and the object of the typographer should be to merge his identity in that of the author, to seek to make his typography so perfectly in tone with the atmosphere of the book as to remove it from the thought of the reader. To illustrate, let us select one class of books, the novels. The novel is a thing of sentiment. When the most prosaic people take a novel in hand they bid farewell to the workaday world, and swing themselves out upon the open sea of sentiment. Nothing affects them then in the ordinary manner, nor to the ordinary degree. The printer of the novel should take close cognizance of this fact ; he must, if he hopes to help bring

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success for the novel, and for himself as a printer of novels. He must put himself into the atmosphere of the book he has in hand to print, and he must strive with all his might to create a typographic style which will harmonize with the literary atmosphere of the book. I do not insist, as many writers do, upon appreciable harmony between the motive of the novel and the typography, because it is often difficult to determine what the motive of a novel is, and if it has any motive. Every book has an atmosphere however, that can easily be felt and as easily translated into a typographic conception. It is this quality of the typography of novels that requires to be given particular attention by printers, at the present time. It is those few printers who are able to bring their typography into this interpretative sympathy with the atmosphere of the

## Type and Motive

book who are winning distinction and making money.

To be more specific, and to bring our attention directly to the practical phase of our topic, let us briefly consider some of the elements of the art of making books as nearly as possible to artistic standards. We must consider them as vehicles for literature as well as objects of art. Ought we not to make this specification much stronger, and insist that books must be considered first and most strenuously as the material form of literature? But even so we are brought again to the same viewpoint we would occupy were we only to insist that a book must be a work of art, limited; for literature is a form of art, and whatever best expresses, or conveys, literature must of necessity partake of the same, or a like, atmosphere. So, though we may broaden and generalize our view,

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or concentrate and specialize it, we return to the very same proposal, that books may be more artistic, and therefore ought to be.

# Typographic Harmony



## Typographic Harmony

**T**HE making of the book to express, or to aid in expressing, the literary motive should be the first thought of the bookmaker, and every other consideration should be made to play up to this, or be forced to be subservient to it. Observers of human character are prone to predicate the qualities of a person from his looks. With books it should be more easy to reconcile physical appearance with literary motive. It is to be recognized at the outset that, with paper and types, with form and binding, there is only a suggestive power; never a graphic power nearly approaching the pictorial. The best we can hope is that we may suggest the literary motive through the physical feature of a book.

It is quite easy to conceive that the writings of Mrs. Edith Wharton and Mr. Henry James require to be booked in a manner to suggest the subtle re-

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finement of their literary style ; that a novel by Mr. Maurice Hewlett demands vigor and brawn in its physique ; that a historical work must be conventional to the extremest limit ; that Mr. Kipling's and Mr. Stephen Phillips's poems should not be given a similar typographic dress ; that Ben Johnson is entitled to one style and Robert Louis Stevenson to another. This is a matter that should be adjusted by an expert in typography who also has a keen literary sympathy. It is often shockingly bungled, but happily not as often as formerly. This sympathetic treatment should include the typography, the paper, the binding, the format, the title page—every element of the book—and all should be made to breathe the spirit of the text, and to help to interpret it.

Next in importance is the understanding and the application of a few

## Typographic Harmony

of the principles of art which are elementary in art—harmony, balance, proportion, tone, color, and a few others in a less imperative and constant sense. To blaze the way for the operation of these primary elements of art, a virtue which is more elemental than either of them must be imposed upon the bookmaker—the virtue of restraint. Types have been running amuck for a generation. The tendency is to over-display, to emphasize beyond reason. This should first be cured. An idea that art and archaism are synonymous terms has become imbedded in the practice of many bookmakers. When it can be rooted out the way for real art influences will have been opened.

Typographic harmony may easily be secured, and should be insisted upon. Every printed line in a book should conform to a rule of harmony determined upon when the scheme of

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the book is adopted. The half title, the copyright notice, the title page, the table of contents, the list of illustrations, the chapter and page headings, the foot notes, the printer's imprint, ought all to be composed in a style to suggest harmony, and in accord with a well defined typographic scheme. All of these features should be in the same face of type as that used for the text of the book, and all should be composed with capital letters, or all with lower-case letters. The only deviation from this rule that is permissible is that the title page and the different headings may, sometimes, be set in a "title" letter, which is a modification of the capitals of the ordinary roman type, but more perfectly adapted for use in lines of capital letters. This variation from the rule cannot be indulged when the text of the book is set in what is known as "oldstyle" type.

## Typographic Harmony

Such an anachronism as this is frequently found in modern book-making.

Proportion, a cardinal typographic virtue, may be held to include the questions of the title page, the format, and the margins, three extremely important elements of the artistic book. It also relates to the size and form of the page. This is a very vital question. While the pages of some books, from the earliest, have been properly proportioned, it is not unfair to our fathers to recall that their pages were not fashioned according to any rule of art, but to conform to the size of the sheet of paper to be used. Now the matter is given much thought, and the mathematically inclined have formulated rules to determine the size of nearly all forms of pages. The best guide is the trained sense of the printer who understands those principles of art that may be applied to typography. An or-

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dinary octavo page should conform nearly to this rule, that the distance from one upper corner to the opposite lower corner, including the page heading, should be double the width. There are several other rules, but it often happens that they must be modified to secure proper margins, which is of more importance than to have the page conform exactly to rule.

The format includes the margins, and it involves careful attention to rules of art, and some other considerations. It is not possible to arrange the format in a satisfactory manner if economy is to be observed. It involves some generosity on the part of the publisher, as it demands some white paper. In fixing the format two pages must be taken as the unit, and they must be placed upon the paper in a manner to produce an agreeable optical effect and a sense of unity. This is

## Typographic Harmony

usually secured by allowing the least space for the back margins, one-fourth more for the top, and a like progressive increase for the front and foot margins, though the foot margin is often given more than this proportionate increase. There are those who compute the area of the margins to ascertain their correct proportions, but I prefer the judgment of the cultivated eye, which takes note of the size of the type, the shape of the page and the leaf, the tone of the type page, the strength of the heading (or its absence), the style and strength of the pagination, the literary motive, etc.

The title page is a very important item in the sum of good bookmaking. There is a literature of title pages, of many erudite volumes. It should be made a most careful study by the printer and the author. It must implicitly harmonize with the type

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scheme of the book; it must be the keynote of that type scheme. It must be perfectly proportioned. It should be exceedingly brief, consisting of the fewest possible words, to be entirely absorbed by the reader in the glance possible while the leaf is being turned. That one glance should be caught and made to mirror upon the mind a vivid and definite impression. The construction of the title page is the text of the bookmaker.

Other mechanical items in the making of a book might be given detailed attention. One of the first importance is the "spacing" of the type, the separation of the words one from another by white spaces. This, together with the separation or leading, of the lines, is the chief agent in determining the tone of the page—the relative amount of black ink and white paper. Beside being an art element of the

## Typographic Harmony

greatest importance, this question of tone has a hygienic quality which cannot be ignored. It is not a simple question. Many elements enter into it: the tint and finish of the paper, the size and blackness of the type, the width of the margins, the spacing of the type, and the leading of the lines. Back of all is the literary motive. All these must be carefully considered, and the result proclaims the quality of the printer, and has a bearing upon the financial fortunes of the book.



# The Ideal View



## The Ideal View

**I** KNOW very well that few readers of books make an analysis like this. Very few consider such matters at all. But, on the other hand, many recognize in a book the qualities that make it typographically right; or, at least, are conscious of a more or less distinct sense that it is right. It is no part of an artist's art to consciously bank upon the ignorance of his audience. It is no valid excuse for neglecting anything that constitutes a perfect book to plead ignorance on the part of the readers. A book should be as perfect a vehicle as possible for the entry of the author's motive into the reader's mind—so perfect a vehicle as to obliterate itself, as it were, and leave with the reader no sense of the book but a clear impression of its motive. This is, I am aware, an ideal view, and almost an impossible one; yet it is the proper conception to color the printer's en-

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deavors and guide him in his work. Even a cursory examination of the details mentioned brings us again to the field of art, and impresses upon us with renewed force the fact of the vital connection between art and printing. The connection is as yet almost wholly theoretic. But few printers recognize the legitimacy of the argument, or the necessity for the study it suggests. Fewer still have made any attempt to obtain even a working understanding of the art tenets that may be made useful to them. Bookshops may be searched for examples of printing illustrating these principles of art I have spoken of, and the search will be almost vain. The so-called editions de luxe are no better in this respect than the novels; not, indeed, as worthy. Many of them sacrifice art and good taste to an ill-judged desire to emphasize the difference between their

## The Ideal View

books and ordinary books, and are thus led into absurdities in type, paper, and bindings, which damn all pretense of artistic treatment.

One feature of modern bookmaking deserves mention, though it is not strictly within the scope of our inquiry. It is the enduring quality. The ancient books were made to serve many generations, chiefly, it may be shrewdly surmised, because the ancient book-makers did not know how to make them otherwise. The books made in our day are mostly perishable, not constituted to worthily outlive the generation they were made for. While we may view this condition with entire equanimity with respect to many current books, realizing that the world will feel no shock when they imitate the famous "one-hoss shay," there are always a few books whose life we would like to reckon as likely to extend

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beyond the bounds of our own. It is quite possible to make a book that may be read by our descendants several centuries hence. It is not often done. Many of the ordinary books of the day will show decided symptoms of decay at the end of their first quarter century.

# The Imperial Press



## The Imperial Press

**O**UR special equipment for making books according to the principles set forth in this little book is complete, and we are prepared to estimate upon editions of any size, of books of any description. We particularly wish to produce books that are distinctive, as to design, workmanship, and material; and we invite publishers to consult us when they contemplate bringing out books that need particular and distinctive treatment.

We are also ready to estimate upon editions requiring conventional treatment, such as histories, etc., and have had valuable experience in this class of work.

We have for years made a specialty of editions de luxe, privately printed volumes, memorial volumes, and books brought out for special and occasional purposes, and we are able to quote very reasonable prices upon all such.

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We also do a large business in catalogues, booklets, brochures, etc., and are always able to assist our patrons in selecting and originating novel and pleasing effects.

If you have any printing which you wish executed in a manner that will add to its value, we invite you to correspond with us.











